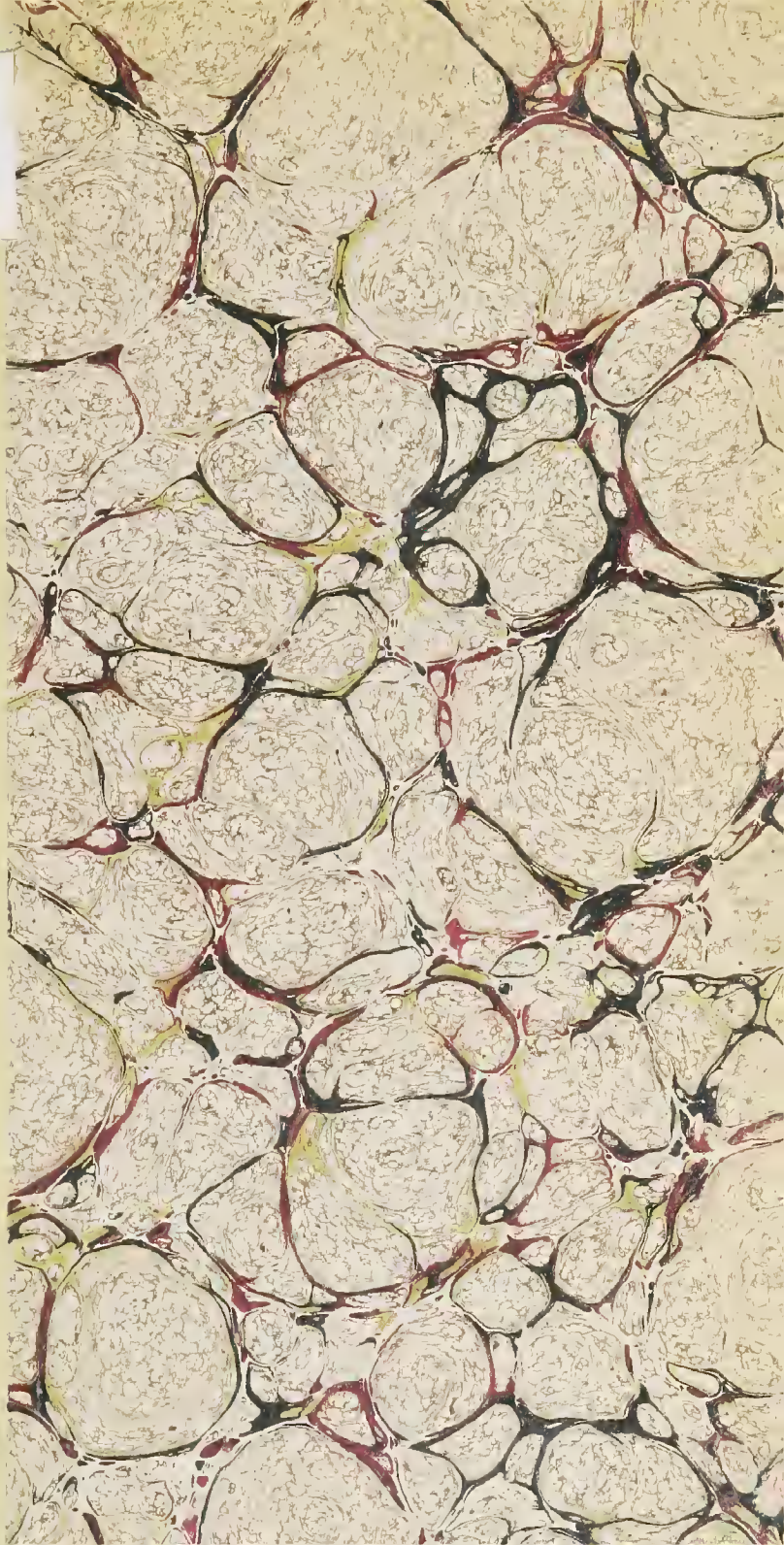


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In Memoriam.
Bertram Dobell.
1842=1914.

Perry J^{hn}. Dobell

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IN MEMORIAM—BERTRAM DOBELL.

1842-1914.

I HOPE that no apology will be thought necessary for the few words that I desire to say with reference to my late Father. His career has been so fully and sympathetically dealt with by various writers in the public press, that I do not feel it necessary to repeat the story of his early struggles.

Alert of mind to the end, he never lost his keen interest in men and affairs. He passed away at 3.30 p.m. on the 14th of December, 1914, only a few hours after asking to have the headlines of the newspaper read to him. From the outbreak of the war he realised intensely—far more intensely than the average man could do—the horror and the devastation which it was to cause, and the intensity of his grief for suffering humanity was such, that the beginning of the strife literally came to him as a premonition of his own end. From day to day, as he read of the bloodshed and the butchery, his heart grew sadder and sadder, and time after time he gave expression to the conviction that he could not live to see the end of the greatest calamity in history. The thoughts of a man nearing his 73rd year would naturally shape themselves more or less into this form, but his friends little dreamed that his premonitions were to be so soon fulfilled. It is a pleasure to think that he lived long enough to know that the first fierce onrush of the Germans had been stayed, and that the ultimate result of the war could not be in doubt.

An omnivorous reader from boyhood, blessed with a retentive memory, and untrammelled by scholastic training or the influence of any set educational system, he developed a critical faculty which seldom led him astray, and which enabled him, with unerring instinct, to recognise merit

instantly. I might almost say that his feeling for style and his critical ability were the foundation of his literary reputation, for, long before he had published any original work, his name was known to the World of Letters as the discoverer of James Thomson, and it was owing to his efforts that the now famous *City of Dreadful Night* was published in book form. In later years when the Traherne Manuscripts came into his hands, he at once suspected that the late Dr. Grosart's ascription of them to Henry Vaughan was erroneous. The remarkable chain of evidence by which the anonymous MSS. were conclusively proved to be the work of Thomas Traherne is fully set forth in the introduction to Traherne's Poetical Works.

It was in 1901 that the first privately printed edition of *Rosemary and Pansies* appeared, followed by its publication (with alterations and additions) in 1904. *Sidelights on Charles Lamb* was published in 1903; and *A Century of Sonnets* in 1910. During August of last year, the Rowfant Club, of Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., set up in type a sonnet-sequence, "A Lover's Moods." The proof sheets of this book were corrected and returned, but my Father did not live to see a completed copy. This seems a small output, but it must be remembered that my Father devoted a great deal of time to all the editorial work which he undertook, and made many literary contributions to the *Athenæum*, *Notes and Queries*, the *Quarterly Review*, and other periodicals, and he has left behind a large quantity of unprinted verse.

He had an indomitable spirit, energy, perseverance, and a bull-dog determination. To leave behind a name which would be remembered in the World of Letters was the cherished ambition of all his days, and to the attainment of this end he was ready to sacrifice almost all that the average man regards as essential to happiness. Society and the ordinary pleasures of society had no attractions for him.



Bertram Dobell
Z



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For change of occupation he resorted chiefly to the Book Auction Rooms, where the excitement of bidding for a coveted lot gave activity to his spirit, and the mental stimulus which resulted prevented any feeling of soul-weariness, though, latterly, he could not shake off the feeling of weariness of body, and the need of longer and longer hours of sleep and rest. A less strenuous relaxation was his love, which he frequently gratified, of the theatre and the opera. Throughout life his interest in music and the stage never deserted him, and he had a large fund of information relative to the leading actors, actresses and operatic performers of the Nineteenth Century.

Although able to talk on his favourite subjects—his manuscripts and literary finds—he was, during the last few weeks, unable to read. This was a loss which he felt very keenly. The last book that he handled was a copy of the “New Poems” by Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, edited by Sir F. G. Kenyon. This volume includes two poems by Robert Browning written in his youth—the only youthful poems of his preserved. My Father was lucky enough to find these poems among the papers he purchased at the dispersal of the Browning relics in May, 1913. The following are the very last verses my Father composed, they were written at his dictation on December 4th and 5th, on the wrapper of the aforesaid volume:—

“Dying, I have no fear of death,
But only fear of life.
Nor would from fate accept new breath,
I want no more of strife.”

* * *

“From first to last I was myself alone,
No servile follower of convention’s school;
Methinks some seeds not barren I have sown.
I was no sophist’s dupe. No party’s tool.”

His correspondence with Men of Letters extended over a long period. George Julian Harvey, the Chartist, during

the last few years of his life was a familiar correspondent and intimate friend. Edmund Gosse and Austin Dobson were always ready with words of help and encouragement in all his literary efforts. And amongst his friends and helpers in both his literary and business career I must not omit to mention Mr. G. Thorn Drury, K.C., Mr. E. V. Lucas, Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, Mr. A. H. Bullen, Mr. H. Buxton Forman, The Right Hon. John Burns, M.P., Mr. Thos. J. Wise, Madame Hamelius-Wilcox, the late Professor Dowden, and the late Colonel W. F. Prideaux.

I have already said that my Father retained his mental powers to the end of his life. From the outbreak of the War until his fatal illness fell upon him, he was engaged in writing poems and sonnets on the great conflict. The war almost monopolized his mind. From among the few other things he wrote immediately before he was stricken down, I do not think I can do better than quote the following sonnet, practically his last completed poetic effort, as the closing lines of this brief memento:—

“Now that my days are drawing to an end,
And soon my restless spirit will have rest,
My thoughts upon the time to come I bend,
And send them forth on a prophetic quest:
Will aught endure of all that I have done?
Will any care my memory to recall?
Of all the many webs that I have spun
Must all alike to tattered fragments fall?
How that may be I know not; but I know
That whatsoever the event may be
I did full well some goodly seeds to sow,
E’en though to wither be their destiny.
A good deed done, though by the world unknown,
O’er kings and lords the doer doth enthrone.”

Much that he has done I feel sure will endure. May his spirit rest in peace.

PERCY J. DOBELL.

THE LATE BERTRAM DOBELL.

Some Press Appreciations.

THE ROMANCE OF THE BOOKSELLER: A DISAPPEARING TYPE.

"The recent death of Mr. Bertram Dobell has called attention to the fast disappearing Romance of Bookselling. The story of Mr. Dobell's modest but strenuous life has already been told at length in every journal that pretends to make any literary appeal. It is therefore superfluous to recount its chief incidents or even to describe the personal charm of a bookseller who was also in his own fashion a scholar. He loved old books, and, though he lived by selling them, he sometimes left the impression on his patrons that he was rather sorry than otherwise that they had called to snatch from his keeping the literary treasures which his judgment and discrimination had enabled him to gather. His little shop at 77, Charing Cross Road was a place where one might linger examining this precious volume or that without being molested in the scrutiny with any importunity to buy. Dobell knew his customers, and his customers knew him, and out of the happy confidence established between them came many literary confidences as well as substantial orders. In other words, Dobell held his knowledge—along certain lines it was intimate and deep—at the service of all comers, and if he could help any genuine student to clear up a difficult point at issue, he really seemed almost as glad as if they had made a handsome inroad upon his stock in trade.

"Men of Bertram Dobell's stamp are rare. This is a hustling age of brisk utilitarian methods even when it comes to the handling of old books. Many dealers in them are deplorably ignorant—they apparently never concern themselves with the contents of the volumes they sell—and though they live all their days in a library which is always changing, they are more concerned with the contents of the latest newspaper than the magic appeal of the volumes on their shelves. Five minutes with a second-hand bookseller of this sort spells absolute disillusionment to a student who sees in less than that time that the man on the other side of the counter can tell him absolutely nothing except, perhaps, what the last copy of some precious tome in his possession realised when it was placed under the hammer. We have seen it stated, in a picturesque leading article by the way, that Bertram Dobell was the 'last of his calling.' That is a contention which we stoutly deny; it would be a bad day for connoisseurs of old books if it were true. It is not merely a misleading but an unfair statement, for there are scholars still in the old bookshops, though they are more scarce in London perhaps than in the more leisured activities of provincial towns. Quite a score at least of catalogues which are published from time to time by booksellers scattered up and down the land are marked more or less by the literary touch which found perhaps more perfect expression in Bertram Dobell's monthly appeal to his

customers. It will be a bad day if ever the old bookseller of his type is improved off the face of the earth, but we refuse to believe—since literature makes as great an appeal as anything else in the world—that that will ever happen. Of course, just now, books old and new are having a rough time, but when the piping days of peace return and the sword is sheathed we may expect a revival of the philosophic mood in which they flourish. Emerson used to say that when anyone told him he really ought to read some new book he felt a serious call to take down some old favourite from his shelves, and his reputation for intellectual courage was not imperilled by that wise decision.

"The last catalogue issued by Bertram Dobell lies before us. It was published a fortnight before his death, and, as usual, makes a direct appeal to men with ideas in their head as well as money in their pocket. There is a pathetic note at the end of it—too long to cite as it stands—in which the old bookseller states that he can think of scarcely anything else but the present 'ghastly contest,' about which, like every man who thinks at all, he was greatly disquieted. He adds that many literary projects which he had in view 'have had to be abandoned or postponed in consequence of the anxieties of the present situation.' Then he goes on to say, 'Age having disqualified me from taking any active part in the struggle, I have occupied myself with writing verses upon it.' He proceeds to announce that he intends to publish shortly his 'Lyrics and Sonnets of the War,' and no doubt his two sons who have succeeded to the business will let us have the volume in due course.

"Bertram Dobell could write excellent verse and racy prose as well. He possessed the romantic mood and the cares of business never quenched it. We think of him to day as the man who befriended, to some purpose, the unhappy poet who wrote 'City of Dreadful Night,' discovered the abiding claims of Thomas Traherne as a singer of unborrowed rhymes, and revived the fame of another poet who had fallen into undeserved oblivion, William Strode, who lived, if he did not exactly flourish, in the far-off reign of Charles I. Dobell also made lovers of English letters his debtor by gathering up the scraps which fell from the rich table of Charles Lamb, for whose memory he cherished a reverence which was not far short of idolatry. We have said enough to show that Bertram Dobell was a fine example of the second-hand bookseller who brought taste, imagination and sympathy to the interpretation of his calling. But he was not the last of his order, as we have good reason to know—though it would be difficult to name amongst those who still flourish in the land any with his peculiar combination of gifts. It is certain that no second-hand bookseller of modern times has made so 'lucky a find' as Thomas Traherne. Surely Bertram Dobell's honourable career, which ended rich in literary friendships, is itself a proof that The Romance of Bookselling is even in these days a matter on which we can congratulate ourselves. The old order changes, but there still survives—though the familiar shop in Charing Cross Road has lost its genial master—amongst a few at least who make their livelihood by dealing in the mellowed wisdom of the printed pages of vanished centuries—the passion for letters in the strict application of a beautiful term."—*The Standard*, January 12th, 1915.

THE LAST OF HIS CALLING.

"The death of Mr. Bertram Dobell removes the last of the booksellers in the older and broader meaning of the term, and one that carries us back to the day when booksellers were publishers as well. Johnson, who flourished in the heyday of that period, said of the booksellers that they were 'generous, liberal-minded men,' and praise of that kind from the lexicographer was praise indeed. In our time, when the two functions of book-dealing have become divided in obedience to economic needs, and the tendency to specialisation has subdivided each into many branches, there is a tendency to regard publishing as a profession and bookselling as a trade. The one division is given to looking down upon the other, much as a surgeon may good-naturedly condemn the barber, whose avocation is the ancient parent of his own. But in Bertram Dobell the finest qualities came together of both sections in what he was indifferent whether it were styled a 'trade' or not. He taught himself in the teeth of every disadvantage the secrets of a difficult calling, and having mastered it and the esteem of his rivals, he championed them when their rights were called in question, and gained their recognition as a leader. But by this time he had put English literature under a higher indebtedness. We owe to him the discovery of Thomas Traherne and the re-discovery of William Strode, and the first and second orders in the firmament of English lyric poetry are by so much the gainers.

"Everything that Bertram Dobell touched he freshened back to life. We owe him much new material from the pen of Elia and two new versions of Sidney's 'Arcadia,' which is the Bible of English chivalry. He wrote good verse himself and graceful prose; and he represented the highest traditions in literary editorship by just attribution and sound estimates. As for his zealous friendship and fostering of the poet of 'Dreadful Night,' it is part of the annals of our literature, and carries us back to the spirit of the days when writing for a living was a gamble with fate. In those days Johnson said of the bookseller with whom he quarrelled: 'I respect Miller, sir, he has raised the price of literature.' We may say of Mr. Dobell no less, and interpret the great Samuel's meaning on as high a level as we like."

—*The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 15th, 1914.

"Lovers of literature will hear with very genuine regret of the death of Mr. Bertram Dobell. He was one of the very last contemporary booksellers of the old school, who, as in the days of Dr. Johnson, combined publishing with bookselling. But Mr. Dobell's interests were not confined to the commercial side of literature. He was himself a really distinguished poet, and a bibliophile in the best sense of the word; he loved his books so well that he might have taken as his device, in parody of Omar, 'I often wonder what the bookseller buys, one-half so precious as the wares he sells.' Mr. Dobell's early days were spent in adversity, and it was not until he was nearly thirty that he was able to open the little stationer's and newsvendor's shop in Kentish Town, which afterwards blossomed out into the establishment in the Charing Cross Road that is known to booklovers the world over.

"Mr. Dobell was a pioneer in the publication of reprints of original editions, he rescued Thomas Traherne and William Strode from oblivion, and, as already mentioned, was himself a poet of distinction. But it is as the friend and editor of James Thomson that he will, perhaps, most be remembered. Admiring the poet's work, he sought out his acquaintance, and thus began the friendship between the bookseller-poet and the author of the 'City of Dreadful Night.' A good deal of Thomson's work was submitted to his friend before it went into print, and after his death Mr. Dobell edited and published his complete writings, being thus to a very large extent responsible for Thomson's posthumous fame."

—*The Globe*, December 15th, 1914.

"The death on Monday, of Bertram Dobell, depriving London as it does of the most 'literary' of its second-hand booksellers, has occasioned widespread regret among journalists and men of letters, to whom Mr. Dobell was always ready, from his wealth of knowledge and experience, to give his assistance. The late bibliophile now and again contributed valuable letters to *The Athenæum*, and in the medium of verse he gave virile as well as rhythmic expression to his thoughts and imaginings. In Mr. Dobell's most recent poem, 'A Lover's Moods,' as yet only fragmentarily published, there are stanzas, declared Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, that are destined to live. Mr. Dobell did not merely buy and sell books; by laborious and persistent research he rediscovered several old English writers—notably William Strode and Thomas Traherne; while modern English literature has been enriched by the editions he has given us of the works, with memoir, of his friend James Thomson, the gifted, hapless poet of 'The City of Dreadful Night.'"—G., *The Newspaper World*, December 16th, 1914.

"Surely the complete man of letters is he who both writes and edits, publishes and sells books old and new. The passing of Mr. Bertram Dobell, at the age of seventy-three, emphasises his vitality and energy in all these fields.

"It is but a few days ago that he paid a visit to this office. He was far from well, and said, 'This war is killing me.' . . .

"Mr. Dobell's own poems, 'Rosemary and Pansies,' may not be very well known. But they are a treasure to those who possess them. They are standing evidence that the bookman does not become dry, but mellow as the dream-laden shelves that are his bulwarks. One might say of him, in Traherne's words:—

'I was as high and great
As kings are in their seat,
All other things were mine:
The world my house, the creatures were my goods,
Fields, mountains, valleys, woods,
Men and their arts to make me rich combine.'"

—*T. P.'s Weekly*, December 26th, 1914.

January, 1915.

IT is with much regret that we have to announce the death, on the 14th December last, of Mr. Bertram Dobell, who founded this business in 1876.

The business will be continued by ourselves, and we trust that our late Father's customers and friends will extend to us the patronage hitherto given to him. We hope to preserve the cordial relations established for so many years between Bertram Dobell and his customers.

PERCY JOHN DOBELL.

ARTHUR EUSTACE DOBELL.

77 & 54 *Charing Cross Road,*
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In memoriam. Bertram Dobell. 1842-1914



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